Note by LMB: This was a memorial tribute written directly after Jim Baen's death in the summer of 2006 for *Locus Magazine*'s obituary section.

Jim Baen Remembered

It was twenty years ago last October that Jim Baen called me up in my grubby little kitchen in Marion, Ohio, and bought my first three completed novels, two of which he had not yet read. At that point I knew almost nothing about Baen Books, except that my friend and first reader Lillian Stewart Carl had met then-senior-editor Betsy Mitchell at a convention, thought she might give the book a fair read, and suggested I try them. When *The Warrior's Apprentice* came back from its third or fourth rejection that summer, I did. My notions about publishers and publishing were terribly vague and–I think "imaginative" might be a good word, here–back then, and I really had no idea who or what this person was on the other end of my phone line, except that he was offering me the stars. Which I grabbed.

Baen Books actually started at nearly the same moment I first set pencil to paper on my first novel, and were still new in 1985, so I may perhaps be forgiven for having barely heard of them. I had no idea how long or if the company would last, but hey, they wanted my books. Through a succession of phone conversations–me bewildered and slightly paranoid, Jim very patient–I gradually learned the ins and outs of how editing was done, how royalty reports were done, how books were marketed, how cover art happened, and a host of other professional skills.

I first met Jim face-to-face in an elevator crush in the lobby of the Atlanta Marriott at the '86 Worldcon. I recognized him from his photo in *Locus*, and from his trademark white beard and jacket that made him look like a sort of SF-nal Colonel Sanders. I rather frantically introduced myself, and as he was borne away into the elevator with the fannish mob he called back something like, "If you can write three books a year for seven years, I can put you on the map!" To which my plaintive reply was–and I can't now remember if I voiced it or not–"Can't I write one book a year for twenty-one years?" I don't know if he ever knew how much he alarmed me with that.

This was also the con where I was first introduced to the custom of meals with one's editor/publisher–breakfast, in this case–the first of many memorable feeds with Jim. I believe our next meal together was the Nebula banquet in New York, where the same book we'd been discussing in Atlanta was now up for best novel. We were all very nervous, or at least I was; I don't know how refined and intellectual the conversation was at other tables, but we devolved to telling light

bulb jokes. I was so excited when *Falling Free* won that I hugged him, and he looked wonderfully smug. Worldcon that fall brought the first of a long string of memorable post-Hugo-Ceremony Baen parties, to some of which I brought back wins and others losses but to all of which I was warmly welcomed.

Jim had a lot of ideas about promoting writers that I think would have been wrong turns for me, had I taken them–collaboration with a better-selling writer, world-sharing, and so on–but he certainly proved later that they could work with the right combination of writers and projects. I'd like to think that the lively and successful promotion via the Baen website of *A Civil Campaign* back in 1999 helped inspire his ideas for web-based promotion and publishing, although I know other colleagues had more practical input on that. He always made it very clear that the last word in any editorial discussion, and we did have a few, was mine. And he put up with a great deal of dithering from me over the years on various subjects, including of course covers–I will say, if any of my Baen covers didn't work, it certainly wasn't for any lack of trying on everyone's parts.

Between geographic distance and the busyness of our respective and intertwined careers, Jim and I never became close social friends, but quantity has a quality all its own, and twenty years is a long time to work together, even if it is generally a thousand or so miles apart. And he always loved the hyperactive little git. Last fall on the twentieth anniversary of that life-changing phone call, I sent Jim a card with a photo of the Mississippi River (near which I now live, and representing, I suppose, a lot of water over the dam) more or less thanking him for my career. He e-mailed back to say he was touched–and, being Jim, to angle for another Miles book. For once in my life it seemed I was not too late in saying the thanks you wish like hell you'd said to the people who've mattered most, because Toni, when she called me this morning to tell me he'd passed away last night, said he'd still had the card on his desk. So that's something.

Lois McMaster Bujold, 6/29/06